



# Social media policy

---

## Summary

---

This policy informs Council staff and contractors of processes, guidelines and issues relating to the use of social media.

---

## Policy background

---

Inner West Council recognises that social media is an essential communication, engagement and customer service channel. However, clear and consistent guidelines are required to ensure its appropriate use by Council staff and contractors.

This policy is consistent with existing policies, such as the Code of Conduct, media policy and policies on the acceptable use of information technology.

Council's Code of Conduct states that Council officials, including staff and contractors, must not conduct themselves in a manner that is likely to bring Council or holders of civic office into disrepute and this applies to the use of social media.

---

## Policy purpose

---

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Identify the parameters around and process for managing Council's use of social media;
- Guide Council staff and contractors on the personal and professional use of social media sites;
- Protect the reputation of Inner West Council; and
- Ensure up-to-date, relevant information to the community, and provide an effective platform for engagement and customer service.

---

## Who this policy applies to

---

This policy relates to the use of social media channels by Council staff and contractors at all levels of the organisation in both an official and personal capacity.

This policy applies to the use of social media during work time or outside of work, on Council devices or personal devices.

The policy provides guidance on the use of social media for:

- Council staff and contractors who access Council's social media channels;
- Council staff and contractors who have been approved to create and moderate social media channels on behalf of or as a representative of Inner West Council;
- Council staff and contractors who create and/or moderate external sites themselves in a personal capacity that may refer to Council; and

- Council staff and contractors using social media in a personal capacity.

---

## **Related legislation, policies and procedures**

---

Related policies:

- Media Policy;
- Inner West Council Crisis Communications Guidelines;
- Public Interest Disclosures Policy;
- Council's Code of Conduct;
- Code of Meeting Practice; and
- Community Engagement Framework.

Related legislation:

- *Local Government Act 1993 NSW*;
- *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 NSW*;
- *The Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 NSW*;
- *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 NSW*;
- *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 NSW*;
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 NSW*;
- *Model Code of Conduct for Local Councils in NSW 2015*;
- *Copyright Act 1968 Cth*; and
- *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 Cth*.

---

## **Policy**

---

### **1 Definition of social media**

Social media facilitates the creation and sharing of information and ideas via virtual communities and online networks. It invites communication, collaboration, discussion and debate. It also enables the development of social and professional networks, groups, followers and contacts.

For Inner West Council, social media provides an opportunity to disseminate relevant and timely information to, and engage with, the community in a simple, cost effective, immediate and easily accessible way.

Council uses social media to:

- Reach a wide, diverse and engaged audience;
- Raise awareness, educate, inform and entertain;
- Encourage dialogue between Council and the community;
- Enable Council to gain insight into the community and its needs via public feedback; and
- Respond to questions and service requests on Council's webpage.

This policy relates and applies to Inner West Council's established social media platforms, including but not limited to:

- Facebook;
- Twitter;
- Instagram;
- Your Say Inner West;
- YouTube;
- LinkedIn;
- Council's Intranet;
- Blogs; and
- Video podcasts.

This includes Council's main 'pages', as well as pages for Council services such as libraries and aquatic centres.

Council may also add new and additional platforms in future, such as Google+ or Snapchat, and this policy will apply to any new platforms.

## **2 Roles and responsibilities of Council staff and contractors**

Council staff and contractors should be aware that any social media activity or interaction, either official or personal, is public, permanently available, traceable and able to be reproduced elsewhere.

Council staff and contractors should also be aware that whether they intend it or not, what they post online in a private capacity may reflect on Inner West Council, their employment, and they should therefore behave in a way that upholds the values and reputation of Council, consistent with the Code of Conduct and other policies. Council staff and contractors are reminded that all information posted on social media sites is public and should reflect community values.

Council's official social media platforms are administered by the Communications team to ensure consistency of content, tone and style. However, additional moderators may be authorised to post on Council's behalf.

The following rules apply to Inner West Council staff and contractors when using and accessing social media:

### **Official use of social media**

- Council staff and contractors are responsible for all content and management of Council's official social media channels;
- Council staff and contractors who are posting on any social media as a representative of Council must have first gained consent and approval from their manager and the Group Manager Communications, Engagement and Events;
- Council staff and contractors must not express personal or political opinions when using social media for official purposes which may damage Council's reputation;
- Posts on Council's official social media channels are to be non-political in nature unless stating a resolved position of Council;
- Council staff and contractors should be fair, objective and courteous in all social media posts, reflecting our values of integrity and respect;

- When referencing Council, posts must not contain any statement or comment that will bring Council or any of its Council officials into disrepute;
- Council staff and contractors must ensure that they do not commit Council to any action or initiative without appropriate authority/Council resolution;
- Council staff and contractors should seek relevant approvals where appropriate; for example, mayoral approval for any posts using the Mayor's image or quotes; and
- The creation of any new Inner West Council social media accounts must be approved by the Group Manager Communications, Engagement and Events, including a clear strategy and dedicated resources.

### **Personal use of social media**

Where a Council staff member or contractor is identified on their social media as working for Inner West Council, they must ensure that their use of social media complies with, but is not limited to, the following:

- Council staff and contractors must not make negative references to Inner West Council, other Council officials, services or any business-related individual or associated organisation;
- Council staff and contractors must not post material that is obscene, pornographic, defamatory, threatening, harassing or discriminatory to any individual, group or organisation;
- Council staff and contractors must not disclose official, personal or confidential information that is not publicly available;
- Council staff and contractors will ensure that any use of social media is conducted in a professional, polite and respectful manner at all times;
- Council staff and contractors will not speak on Council's behalf (unless with express authority) when posting on other sites, making clear that any views are their own personal opinions and not those of Council;
- Council staff and contractors can only comment on a Council matter if authorised to do so; and
- Council staff and contractors may access personal social media accounts at work as long as the use is infrequent and official work is not disrupted.

Council staff and contractors are also reminded that 'shares', 'likes' or 'retweets' may be viewed as an endorsement of the original post.

Council advises that you don't identify yourself as a Council staff member or contractor in your profile. If you choose to do so (or if your position is one that makes you recognisable to the public), it is advisable to refrain from public debate regarding Council.

## **3 Guidelines for Council staff and contractors using social media**

### **Do ...**

- Follow Council's social media channels to stay in touch with what's happening, and feel free to like and share our posts;
- Remember everything you say and do is public, and you can be identified as a staff member or contractor of Inner West Council;
- Pause before you post – would you be comfortable with this information being shared with your family, friends, work colleagues, media and the broader community, and is the information likely to bring you or Council into disrepute?;

- Share your ideas with the Communications team so we can keep the community informed of what we're doing at Council;
- Respect people's privacy; and
- Report any violations of this policy to the Communications team, Human Resources and/or the Internal Ombudsman.

**Don't ...**

- Post content and/or images with the potential to impact Council's reputation, including sensitive, confidential or personal information;
- Make negative or inappropriate comments about Council and/or Council officials; or
- Use social media excessively while you're at work.

**4 Resourcing, moderation and tone of voice**

Social media sites require frequent moderating and updating, so appropriate resourcing must be provided for official Council social media channels. The style and content of each platform should be tailored according to its audience.

In terms of moderation, constructive criticism or negative comments should not be blocked or removed, unless they are overtly offensive and defamatory or incite hatred and violence.

Council staff and contractors must communicate on social media in a transparent and authentic way. We encourage the community to have their say and respond in an open forum where appropriate.

Council staff and contractors should use plain English and a friendly, less formal tone, but refrain from abbreviated writing; for example, 'How RU?' or 'CU l8r'. Council staff and contractors should ensure all information being posted is factually and grammatically correct.

**5 Emergencies**

In the event of an emergency, publishing information on social media sites will be the responsibility of the Communications team with approval from the General Manager or their delegate.

**6 Breaches**

Inner West Council will use the same policies, procedures and legislation that guide misconduct such as the Code of Conduct, Email and Internet Usage Guidelines, and Council's Disciplinary Policy and Disciplinary Action.

Council staff and contractors who breach this policy by engaging in inappropriate online behaviour may face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, and/or Code of Conduct inquiries.

Inappropriate behaviours may include, but are not limited to:

- Misusing social media or accessing inappropriate content while at work;
- Using social media to ridicule, vilify, harass, cyberbully, discriminate against or bring into disrepute other Council officials or community members;

- Use of social media which may bring Council into disrepute;
- Posting content that is deemed to be offensive, including obscene or sexually explicit language;
- Using official or personal social media channels to post/provide confidential, personal or sensitive information relating to Council; and
- Poor performance related to lost productivity due to time spent on social media platforms while at work.

## **7 Privacy**

There is no such thing as a 'private' social media site. Posting information online is a public activity and no different from publishing information in a newspaper. Council staff and contractors are advised to not post anything to social media sites that they would not be comfortable with if quoted in the media.

Everything posted or received on social media is public property. Once something is published online, control of it is lost forever and it cannot be withdrawn. Search engines can find posts years after publication, while archival systems save or cache information even if deleted.

Information about other Council officials should not be shared. Posts – even deleted posts – are considered 'publication', and are subject to the same defamation laws as any other media.

Council staff and contractors are responsible for any information they release relating to Council, Councillors or other Council officials. Claiming that comments/images are published on private pages is not defensible.

## **8 Communication**

The Social Media Policy will be provided to all new employees through the induction program, made available on Council's Intranet, and the use of social media will be included in learning and development programs where relevant.

## **9 Policy review**

This policy will be reviewed regularly as required and may change at any time.